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### Sexual Offending in Groups: An evaluation

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## Sex Offending in Groups

### Abstract

This review provides a current description of a number of contexts in which multiple perpetrator sexual offending occurs. Specifically, seven sub-categories of offences are examined under two main themes of 'rape of peers/adults' and 'multiple perpetrator offenses against children.' This is complimented by a discussion of psychological theories and factors that contribute to the understanding of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses within a multifactorial framework. Individual, sociocultural and situational levels are examined to provide an explanation for the commitment of sexual offenses with others, with particular emphasis on theories and processes of group aggression. This review provides tentative ideas to stimulate thought and further research in this area.

Key words: sexual offenders; co-offenders; group aggression; group offending; multiple perpetrators.

## 1. Introduction

The perpetration of sexual offenses is unfortunately a widespread occurrence. Types of sexual offenses can vary widely depending on the age of the victim, degree of force or intrusiveness, and the number of perpetrators involved. Whilst the first two of these factors have received considerable attention in the sexual offending literature, multiple perpetrator sexual offenses remain a relatively under-researched area. However, the paucity of research should not be taken as an indication that group sexual offending is relatively uncommon.

The literature that does address sexual offenses carried out by multiple perpetrators paints a somewhat unclear or inconsistent picture. Firstly, the incidence and prevalence of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses are difficult to determine. There are many methodological issues that may affect the estimated size of rape prevalence in general, such as the definition of rape, the approach to screening, and study design (Koss, 1993). Nevertheless, the literature does contain some independently researched figures which estimate the rates at which multiple perpetrator sexual offenses occur. However, this proportional figure differs widely depending on the country and jurisdiction in question (Horvath & Kelly, 2009). For example, Horvath and Kelly (2009) cite studies that report multiple perpetrator rape accounting for a third to half of all rapes in South Africa and between approximately 2 and 26% of rapes in the US, depending on the type of sample accessed. In terms of English rates, over three decades ago, Wright and West (1981) investigated officially recorded incidents of attempted or actual rapes in six English counties between 1972 and 1976. They found 13 percent were carried out by a group of offenders. Similarly, Kelly, Lovett and Regan (2005) sampled 863 service users

at a sexual assault referral centre in Manchester, England, of whom 11% experienced an assault from more than one assailant.

Furthermore, inconsistencies in details about the nature of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses can be found in the reported severity of physical violence involved in such offenses (e.g., Boeljik, 1997; Finkelhor, Williams, & Burns, 1988; Porter & Alison 2006), the intra-racial nature of the victim-offender relationship (e.g., Amir, 1971; Horvath & Kelly, 2009) and whether the majority of victims are strangers or acquaintances to some/all of the offenders in the group (e.g., Bijleveld, Weerman, Looije, & Hendricks, 2007; Horvath & Kelly, 2009; La Fontaine, 1994; Porter & Alison, 2006). Due to the limited amount of research conducted in this area it is not clear whether discrepancies in current findings are due to genuine differences in the samples investigated or are merely a reflection of the varied methodologies used. This highlights the need for more research to be conducted into this phenomenon.

Finally, a number of problems have been identified with current terminology used to name and define rapes that are carried out by more than one perpetrator. To our knowledge discussions around definitional issues of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses are limited to rape. However, the issues raised are applicable to other forms of sexual offences carried out by multiple perpetrators, such as those against children. Horvath and Kelly (2009) provide an account of the difficulties encompassed with using terms such as “gang” or “group” rape. First, they highlight the word “gang” is associated with street gangs (see Wood & Alleyne, this issue), the members of which share an existing allegiance with one another prior to and post any rape. Indeed, a gang has been described as having a relatively stable membership with some level of organization (Bijleveld &

Hendriks, 2003; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004); a criterion that does not reflect the nature of most young people who commit offences in groups (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004).

Furthermore, despite the term “group rape” being introduced into the literature in an attempt to meet the shortcomings of the term “gang rape”, Horvath and Kelly assert that both of these terms fall short in describing rapes carried out by multiple perpetrators.

The authors go on to explain that they believe “multiple perpetrator rape” should be used to coin all sexual assaults involving two or more offenders (Horvath & Kelly, 2009). More specific subtypes of this phenomenon can then be identified (e.g., “gang rape” to refer to groups that consistently operate together with select and stable membership and shared group norms and identity and “Duo rape” to refer to two offenders committing a rape together who have no loyalty to one another beyond potential friendship). Based on this knowledge, this review is structured around the umbrella term “multiple perpetrator sexual offenses”.

Multiple perpetrator sexual offending is predominantly discussed in terms of characteristics of the victim. However, the literature has demonstrated that adolescents commit a significant number of all sex offences (Barbaree & Marshall, 2006). From a review of the literature, this finding appears to be extended to multiple perpetrator sexual offenses and is worthy of discussion. For example, in a study of 101 cases of multiple perpetrator rape allegations to a large police force in England, Horvath and Kelly (2009) found the majority of both victims and offenders were of secondary school age (11-16 years; 32 % and 24% respectively) or young adult age (17-21 years; 25% and 28% respectively). Hunter, Hazelwood, and Slesinger (2000) reviewed the criminal records of 126 US juveniles arrested for sex offences against children ( $n = 62$ ) or peers and adults ( $n$

= 64). In comparison to child sexual offenders, offenders against peers/ adults more frequently carried out their offenses within a group. Similarly, a Swedish national survey found, out of 163 adolescent sex offenders, 69 (42%) carried out their offense with one or more associates (Kjellgren, Wassberg, Karlberg, Langström, & Svedin, 2006). The sexual abuse of children by multiple perpetrators does occur though, as will be discussed later in this paper, so it is unwise to ignore the potential risk to children posed by groups of offenders. For instance, juveniles were involved in 9% of cases of multiple perpetrator child sexual abuse reported to occur in day care in the US (Finkelhor, et al., 1988). Indeed, co-offending in general has been previously shown to be more prevalent in young offenders than adult offenders (Reiss 1988; Porter & Alison, 2006). In accordance with these findings the existing literature on multiple perpetrator rape, and in some cases multiple perpetrator child sexual abuse, often focuses on adolescent offenders.

### 1.1. Objectives of the Review

The dynamics of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses are clearly very different from cases involving lone perpetrators (Finkelhor, et al., 1988). Zimbardo (2007) goes so far as to say “You are not the same person working alone as you are in a group” (p.8). A social element is introduced as well as other aspects such as how others are inducted into the abuse, how roles within the abuse are allocated, and how to maintain secrecy (Finkelhor et al., 1988). Whilst research into the phenomenon of multiple perpetrator sexual offending is limited, a small number of studies have added to understanding in this area and theoretical explanations are offered as to why individuals participate in this group activity. There are many variations in motivation behind this form of sexual offense, such as sexual deviance, male bonding, and to inflict shame and humiliation on victims and the

victim's friends or family (Horvath & Kelly, 2009; Price, 2001). It is important therefore to acknowledge that multiple perpetrator sexual offending is not a homogenous crime and that further research and understanding of the different types are needed. Understanding of this crime and its various sub-types is very much in its infancy. Nevertheless several theoretical explanations have been proposed in the literature relevant to explaining multiple perpetrator sexual offending.

This review aims to provide the reader with a current description of a number of contexts in which multiple perpetrator sexual offending occurs followed by a discussion of how theory contributes to our understanding of this phenomenon in the various contexts described. Specifically, seven sub-categories of offences are examined under two main themes of rape of peers/adults (i.e., in street gangs, fraternities, and war) and multiple perpetrator offenses against children (i.e., in pedophile organizations, sex rings, day care centers, and residential homes).

A multifactorial framework will be used to explore how theory contributes to our understanding of multiple perpetrator sex offending across the seven sub-categories. Specifically, the proximal confluence model (White & Kowalski, 1998) will be used to organize the relevant factors that can explain group sexual offending. This model was selected because of its breadth in addressing not only sexual aggression, but also general violence. It is useful to consider both of these elements because they often co-occur. Consideration of both allows us to investigate the sub-categories outlined here more comprehensively. The framework highlights the importance of examining individual characteristics, in addition to specific situations in which behavior occurs, as well as in relation to sociocultural factors. As applied previously by Henry, Ward, and Hirshberg



(2004) to explain the occurrence of wartime rape, this framework allows the integration of a number of explanatory theories to be aggregated. In terms of individual factors examined within the framework, the relevance of sexual deviance and cognition will be considered. As for sociocultural factors, rape culture and rape myths, as well as hypermasculinity and male dominance will be examined. Finally, in terms of situational factors male bonding, theories of group behavior, and unique settings will also be examined.

## 2. Multiple Perpetrator Offending Contexts

The contexts in which individuals commit sexual offenses are diverse. We will provide descriptions here for some of the settings in which multiple perpetrator sexual offending is known to occur. Space precluded a discussion of some other known multiple perpetrator offending contexts such as those occurring against children and adults in the context of sport, either by coaches or players, rapes that occur in prison, group date rape that does not occur in fraternities, rape in countries under corrupt governments (e.g., South Africa), and human sex trading. This section aims to highlight some of the most paramount subtypes of this offence and review literature that has specifically addressed each, as well as highlighting the dearth of literature that exists on specific subtypes.

### 2.1. Rape of Peers/Adults.

Perhaps the most commonly perceived type of group sexual offending is that of adult females by groups of adolescent or adult men. We will discuss that this, and rape of same age peers, occurs in such disparate groups as delinquents in street gangs, university fraternity members, and by soldiers in war.

Several findings have been found to be consistent across studies examining multiple perpetrator rape. The majority of studies conducted to date show offender groups are mostly homogenous in their ethnicity (e.g., Bijleveld et al., 2007; Horvath & Kelly, 2009). In terms of sexual acts carried out during the offenses, vaginal rape is commonly reported (e.g., Hunter, et al., 2000; De Wree, 2004; Porter & Alison, 2006). In Porter and Alison's (2006) study 32% of the 223 cases studied involved at least one of the offenders in the group attempting to rape the victim more than once during the offense. Other forms of penetration were also apparent in this study, such as oral (40%), anal (20%), digital (6%) and penetration with an object (4%). However, perpetrators performing acts of oral sex upon the victim were found to be very rare. The most frequent number of offenders found to participate in this type of group crime is between 2 and 4 (Porter & Alison, 2004; 2006; Horvath & Kelly, 2009). In Porter and Alison's (2006) study the sizes of the groups ranged from 2 to 13 members with a mean (and median) of three. Similarly, Horvath and Kelly (2009) reported membership ranging from two to eleven, with a mean of three and median and mode of two members. It is apparent that two perpetrators have been considered a group in studies investigating multiple perpetrator rape therefore they will be included as such in this paper. However it should be noted that it is questionable whether two people co-offending together constitutes a "group" offence.

#### 2.1.1. Rape in Street Gangs

As Horvath and Kelly (2009) assert, the term "gang rape" is intuitively associated with acts of multiple perpetrator rape by members of street gangs. As with other sub-types of

multiple perpetrator rape the literature detailing the involvement of street gangs in such acts is scant.

Rather than concentrating on the rape of female strangers by gang members, the literature does make some reference to coerced group sex with female gang members as a form of US gang initiation (see Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Knox (2004) describes how some females become members of gangs by having sex with multiple male gang members (i.e., “being sexed in”). Goldstein (2002) highlights how verbal and physical aggression used in initiation rituals (referred to as “hazing”) helps to develop group identity and move potential newcomers from out-group to in-group. However, Miller (1998) notes that many girls who are “sexed in” are not treated as true gang members but are treated as weak and promiscuous and are at increased risk for further victimization. She notes that both male and female gang members who were not “sexed in” view the victim as deserving the treatment. Knox also details the case of a man whose task was to set up his girlfriend for a brutal gang rape in order for him to join a US gang. However, Decker and Van Winkle (1996) found that whilst male gang members reported the occurrence of such gang initiations to researchers, female members denied such acts. As Knox explains, this behavior is difficult to study in a systematic fashion as self admission of this behavior may well be unlikely. Therefore, researchers may only get to learn about such acts through victims’ court testimonies or media reports (Knox, 2004).

Whilst it is possible that such acts do take place in some gangs, it is also likely that male members exaggerate the control and domination they have over female members of the gang (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001). Further research has highlighted that females peripheral to a gang, who want to become members, are at risk of sexual

exploitation from male gang members. Cases where the men have conned peripheral females into participating in group sex initiations have been documented (Hagedorn & Devitt, 1999; Portillos, 1999). Multiple perpetrator rape has also been discussed as a means to increase male bonding amongst the street gang members (Bourgois, 1996). Therefore, whilst evidence is mixed as to the extent and reality of sexual victimization of females associated with gangs, there is some suggestion that this should be considered a serious social concern (Moore & Hagedorn, 2001).

#### 2.1.2. Fraternity Rape

Sanday (2007) describes the scenario by which gang rapes typically occur at a party in a fraternity house. The guests consume large amounts of alcohol and some take drugs. In some cases the women may consent to sexual activity with one member of the house but later she finds that a number of other men have entered the room and begin to also engage in sexual activity with her without her consent. Sometimes this occurs amidst clear verbal protests, but in others the victim is too afraid or intoxicated to protest. In other situations, the victim may lose consciousness due to alcohol or drug consumption and awaken to find she is being sexually assaulted by a number of men in the house. Evidence suggests that multiple perpetrator rape in fraternities is a far more common occurrence than might be expected. Amongst 50 group rape incidents reported to university authorities, 60% were perpetrated by fraternity members (Erhart & Sandler, 1985). Tash (1988) claims that over 90% of gang rapes on campus involved fraternity men (although he provides no evidence to support this claim).

Some studies and a meta-analysis have shown a relationship between fraternity membership and self-reported sexual aggression (Brown, Sumner, & Nocera, 2002;

Lackie & de Man, 1997; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Others have also found that men in fraternities were more likely than controls to hold rape myths (e.g., that women like to be roughed up, that women want to be forced into sex, that women have secret desires to be raped, that men should be the controllers in a relationship, that sexually liberated women are promiscuous; Bleeker & Murnen, 2005; Boeringer, 1999; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007). Fraternity men also had a significantly greater number of degrading images of women in their rooms than non-fraternity men (Bleeker & Murnen, 2005). As well, fraternity members reported associating with a greater number of other men who engage in coercive or sexually aggressive behavior, and they were more likely to be reinforced by their friends for engaging in such behavior themselves (Boeringer, Shehan, & Akers, 1991).

Fraternity members describe the process of “working a yes out” in which they ply women with alcohol or otherwise coerce them into what they consider consensual sex (Sanday, 2007). Indeed studies have found high rates of self-reported use of coercion and alcohol and drugs amongst men in fraternities to facilitate sexual activity with a female (Boeringer, 1996; Boeringer, et al., 1991). However, another study found that although male university participants might express opinions which support female victimization (which was also related to excessive alcohol use) there are no differences between fraternity men and other men (Swartz & Nogrady, 1996). It should be noted though that the number of fraternity members in this study was quite small ( $n=22$ ) so conclusions should be taken with caution.

Other studies have not supported the relationship between fraternity membership and sexual aggression. A study examining the role of fraternity affiliation, alcohol use,

and athletic affiliation in predicting gang rapes, did not find fraternity affiliation to be predictive (Koss & Gaines, 1993). Similarly, Gidycz, Warkentin, and Orchowski (2007) did not find that fraternity membership added to the prediction of sexual aggression at three month follow-up when previous self-reported sexual aggression was controlled for in a sample of college men ( $N=425$ ). Although this was only a three month follow-up period, 10% of the participants reported engaging in sexual aggression in that time.

These discrepancies could be explained by Humphrey and Kahn (2000) who found that distinctions need to be made between different types of fraternities. They reported higher levels of sexual aggression, hostility towards women, and male peer support for sexual assault amongst men who were involved in some fraternities that emphasized a party atmosphere compared to other fraternities that did not. Indeed others have noted that all fraternities are not equally risky (Boswell & Spade, 1996; Sanday, 2007). Boswell and Spade (1996) found that fraternities identified as higher risk (i.e., identified by students as having more sexually aggressive members and a higher probability of rape) had a less friendly atmosphere, in which women were treated less respectfully, and were often degraded. Even when men from low-risk fraternities (i.e., those with fewer sexually aggressive men) attended high-risk fraternity parties, they adopted the group norms of the high-risk fraternity.

Although a number of studies have examined the relationship between sexual attitudes, alcohol use, and sexual aggression, their role in multiple perpetrator sexual offenses in fraternities is less clear. The limited data does suggest though, that some fraternities are environments in which rape myths are commonly held/ expressed, and alcohol/ drugs are commonly used to obtain sex and therefore may be environments

conducive to learning and practicing such techniques (Boeringer, 1996). It would appear that in these types of fraternity houses the members also engage in male bonding, often through initiation and anti-female rituals aimed to prove masculinity and maintain secrecy, norms that require “sticking together” right or wrong, and engaging in practices that objectify and commodify women (Martin & Hummer, 1987; Sanday, 2007; Stomblor, 1994). It is suggested sexual aggression is learned in these settings as opposed to being the individual’s predisposition or characteristics of them prior to living in the fraternity (Boeringer et al., 1991). Given such a setting, it is understandable women may be at increased risk for multiple perpetrator rapes.

### 2.1.3. Rape in War

Shocking stories of the atrocities committed against prisoners of war (e.g., Abu Ghraib) or civilian members of opposition communities are not uncommon amongst news stories during times of war. In World War II it was reported that thousands of women were raped, often by several men in sequence, by Soviet forces in Berlin (Wood, 2006). Also during this time, it is estimated that 20,000 to 80,000 women were raped and executed by Japanese soldiers in the Chinese city of Nanjing (Chang, 1997). Many accounts outline chilling descriptions of multiple perpetrator rape such as that of a Yugoslav National Army soldier who took part in the wars in Croatia who claimed “I only remember that I was the 20<sup>th</sup>, that her hair was a mess, that she was disgusting and full of sperm, and that I killed her at the end” (Korac, 1996, p.137). A Bosnian Muslim woman recounts the sexual violence she suffered at the hands of Bosnian Serb soldiers:

It must have happened over 100 times that I was raped. They raped me everywhere, in burnt-out houses and in different rooms in the concentration camp.

Once I asked them to kill me, because I could not go back to my kids after this, but they did not do this. Every day there were different men, and usually they came in groups and they would take out some women and rape them and bring them back, and after that a new group came (Skjelsbaek, 2006, p. 382).

In contrast, despite the long-time violent conflicts in Israel/ Palestine, accounts of sexual violence are virtually unheard of (Wood, 2006) therefore this phenomenon is by no means a natural corollary of conflict.

Although sexual violence likely occurs in most wars, it occurs in varying extents and can take a variety of different forms (Wood, 2006). Serial rape in war is described as a collaborative act (Price, 2001). In some cases the soldiers make a collective decision to rape but in others cases one person initiates and others follow their lead (Price, 2001). In other cases the order of the rapes is negotiated and can be thought to reflect the status of the man in the group (Seifert, 1994). Further, in some circumstances rape is seen as a reward for success in battle (Braithwaite, 2006). The sexual violence can take many different forms such as, (1) sexual slavery in which the women are forced to serve the combatants for extended periods of time, (2) one of many types of torture while being held in detention, (3) indiscriminate rape of women and girls who are encountered during military operations, and (4) public rape in front of an assembled population after the takeover of a village (Wood, 2006).

A study of military records, trial transcripts, and interviews examined the consequences of the US Army's presence in Western Europe from 1942- 1945 (Lilly, 2007). It was determined that in this case, most rapes were committed by individuals who had mental health issues, alcohol issues, or limited intelligence and some had previous



felony convictions. Lilly (2007) also reported that most of the rapes were committed by soldiers who volunteered or were drafted into the service, rather than regular army soldiers and officers. However, this is in contrast to other reports in which rape is promoted or tolerated by leaders of some groups as a way of achieving the group's goals, including as a reward for participation, to promote bonding by members or as a form of terror or punishment against the enemy (Wood, 2006). Indeed, in some cases rape has been used as a type of military policy (Buss, 1998). For instance, in wars of ethnic cleansing types, rape can be used as a weapon to terrorize ethnic groups into fleeing their homes (Braithwaite, 2006).

Members of opposition groups or communities are not the only victims of multiple perpetrator rape in war. Sadler, Booth, and Doebbeling, (2005) recognized the need to investigate the long-term health status and types of care received by women who experience different types of rape. They set out to determine whether differences existed in women veteran's health status and use of health care services by the type of rape they experienced during military service. Structured telephone interviews were conducted with a national cross-sectional survey of women veterans who served in Vietnam and later periods. Of the 540 women who completed the interview 28% reported being the victim of a rape during military service. Of these, 5% reported gang rape.

Wood (2006) suggests that the problem of sexual violence in war must be examined at the level of the overarching large armed group entity, the small group or unit in which combatants engage in face-to-face relations, as well as at the individual level. The armed group can provide incentives or sanctions in relation to the use of sexual violence. Strategic sexual violence appears to occur when the armed group believes it is

an effective form of terror or punishment. Furthermore, the small unit and the individuals may have norms or cognitions prohibiting or endorsing sexual violence. Wood notes that some members of small groups may carry out sexual violence out of concern for social status within the group, even if that person is not particularly inclined towards sexual violence. Morris (1996) notes that amongst the small units involved, there is usually evidence of sexual and gender norms such as dominance, aggressiveness, risk taking, adversarial sexual beliefs, rape myths, and general hostility towards women. Lilly (2007) notes that soldiers are trained to maximize aggression against their “enemies”, to despise and exploit weakness, to dehumanize their opponents, and that they should bond with, and rely on their fellow soldiers. Yet, they are also (perhaps unrealistically) expected to behave with restraint and sensitivity to these “enemies” in other circumstances.

Wartime rape provides a unique opportunity as its documentation across history and continents allows for an examination of commonalities and differences in multiple perpetrator sexual offending across time and setting. As clearly outlined previously in a comprehensive multifactorial model of wartime rape by Henry and colleagues (2004), there are a number of factors that are relevant in explaining multiple perpetrator rape in war.

## 2.2 Multiple Perpetrator Offenses Against children

A variety of circumstances exist in which children are the targets of multiple perpetrators. For a number of these types of offenses against children, little academic knowledge and empirical evidence exists, in spite of many highly publicized cases in the media. One might query what constitutes group offending behavior in these cases. For instance, members of pedophile support organizations, although they do not often offend together,

will be discussed here because their existence as a group appears to support and encourage pedophilic sexual interest and as a corollary, the sexual abuse of children.

### 2.2.1. Pedophile Organizations

Numerous organizations exist which unite those with an interest in sex with children.

These groups tend to advocate (1) that age of consent laws be abolished or lowered, (2) that the social harassment and prosecution of pedophiles should be ended, and (3) the demythologizing of adult sexual behavior with children (DeYoung, 1988). For instance, the Rene Guyon Society which began in the US uses the motto “Sex by year eight or else it’s too late”. Such organizations exist in a number of different countries. These include the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA), the British Pedophile Information Exchange (PIE), and the Norwegian Pedophile Group and Amnesty for Child Sexuality. These organizations claim to have thousands of members including teachers, doctors, and lawyers (Victims of Violence, 2008).

Shedding light on how these groups can be used to normalize an individual’s existing deviant sexual interest in children, several studies have examined the content of publications by these organizations or the messages posted on the message boards or newsgroups of these organizations. The intention of these studies was to provide insight into the beliefs that allow individuals to remain involved in these organizations, despite the substantial social stigma against such sexual interests. De Young (1988) identified a number of methods used to neutralize deviant sexual interest among the publications of the Rene Guyon Society, the Childhood Sensuality Circle, and the NAMBLA. De Young found anecdotal accounts, testimonials, letters, and poetry that describe the beneficial effects of sexual behavior of adults with children supporting what she referred to as the

“denial of injury” category. Evidence for the “denial of victim” category was found in the publications in that the child victims were portrayed as willing partners for the adults and the inclusion of comments insisting that children can give full and informed consent. The “condemnation of the condemners” category illustrates how the organizations attempt to portray those who condemn sex with children as even more exploitive or victimizing. De Young found that these organizations also tended to embed their advocacy for child sex within a larger context of liberation of children as well as attempting to align themselves with other social welfare concerns such as gay rights which is evidence of the “appeal to higher loyalties” technique.

Similarly, others have examined these types of cognitive distortions. Durkin and Bryant (1999) gathered posted messages from an internet newsgroup. Amongst 93 postings by admitted pedophiles that appeared over a one month period, more than half (53.7%) of those who posted a message included at least one justification, and about a quarter (24.4%) of those posting included multiple justifications in their message. Malesky and Ennis (2004) also examined posts from the “Boy chat” internet message board. They examined 11 categories of cognitive distortions including those examined by De Young (1988) and Durkin and Bryant (1999). However, they found less evidence for justifications than were identified in these other studies. Amongst the 238 posts examined over a seven day period cognitive distortions were identified in only 27% of the posts and 10% contained multiple cognitive distortions. Validation of pedophilic ideology was evident in more than 21% of the posts. Most commonly (63%), posts were of a social nature and were not specifically pedophilic in nature.

Internet pedophile support organizations can also be directly involved in the physical sexual abuse of children. In 1996 members of a group called “the Orchid Club” were arrested in the USA (Beech, Elliot, Birgden, & Findlater, 2008). Real time abuse images were recorded with a digital camera and the members viewing the abuse were able to remotely participate in the abuse by requesting abusive behaviors to be carried out (Quayle & Taylor, 2002). These images were transmitted to members located in the USA, Europe, and Australia.

Examination of the writings of these organizations and their members do provide some insight into the role the organizations play in perpetuating or normalizing sexual deviance. However, additional research with men involved in these groups specifically addressing what they feel they gain from membership in such a socially stigmatized group using qualitative methodology would allow for a deeper understanding of this issue.

#### 2.2.2. Child Sex Rings

Sex rings typically involve a set of men who know of each other’s existing sexual interest in children and who then cooperate to recruit children to be abused, pass victims between them, and may be involved in group abuse sessions with the victims (LaFontaine, 1993). Several different types of child sex rings have been identified. Burgess (1984) distinguishes between solo sex rings (involving a single perpetrator and multiple victims), transitional sex rings, and syndicated sex rings. Transitional sex rings are comprised of multiple adults who are sexually involved with pubescent children. These children are tested out as prostitutes in which case they would become involved in the syndicated sex rings (Burgess & Grant, 1988). Transitional sex rings are noted to lack the organization

of syndicated rings. Syndicated sex rings are structured organizations that are involved in recruiting victims, producing pornography, and providing sexual services to other abusers. Child victims can become entrapped in these networks by being coerced into the recruitment and abuse of other children (Kelly & Scott, 1993).

A number of characteristics of child sex rings have been identified by Burgess (1984). Burgess found that 11% of the 55 sex rings were transitional rings, 31% were syndicated rings, the remaining were solo rings (56%) and one ring that could not be classified as any of those described. The majority (96%) of the perpetrators were male. Many (64%) were middle and upper class individuals. Age ranged from 25 to 74 with most (90%) aged between 30 and 59 (median 45). A number (35%) of the perpetrators had convictions for previous sexual offenses. Access to children was gained primarily through occupation, living situation, or other children (Conradie, 2001). In 73 percent of the cases the house of the offender was the location of the ring's activities.

Wild and Wynne (1986) examined 11 child sex rings in Leeds, U.K, although only 3 of these involved two perpetrators and none involved more than two. They found in these three rings the perpetrators were brothers, neighbors, and acquaintances who met in a bar, respectively. Some (8/14) of the perpetrators were known to have been involved in sex rings previously and three had previous convictions for child sexual offenses. In some of the larger rings, older children would be appointed as “ringleaders” or “deputies”. This meant that in addition to being sexually assaulted, they were also responsible for recruiting younger children.

Wild (1989) examined 31 sex rings and found three rings that were operated by two perpetrators and three rings that were operated by four or more perpetrators. In those

with more than two perpetrators, rings were developed into organized groups that supplied sexual services of children on a semicommercial basis. Illustrating the variability amongst these groups, one of the groups was comprised of four young men who abused 11 girls who were aged 12-15. Another involved four older men and at least 20 boys and girls aged 12-15. The third ring involved a man who provided 13 to 16 year old female victims to be abused by his adult friends and acquaintances. Some of the victims were paid small amounts of money and drugs to participate.

Existing research on child sex rings is limited. Indeed, the limited data that does exist comes from older studies. Recent research examining current sex rings is greatly needed to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon as it occurs today.

### 2.2.3. Day Care Centers

It must be noted that day care abuse should be considered within the context of the ongoing debate about the reliability of children's memories and the element of suggestibility in interviewing techniques, as well as the lack of other corroborative evidence in many cases. Although most practitioners and researchers working in the field of sexual abuse would be extremely hesitant to suggest that any type of reported sexual abuse was fabricated (e.g., Gallagher, 2001), there are many questions about a large number of claims of day care child sexual abuse. In particular, it is noted that for many of the cases involving day care abuse that resulted in the accused being charged, in the end the accused was not convicted (De Young, 1997). There was commonly a lack of objective physical evidence and no independent corroboration (in terms of perpetrator confession or other adult witnesses) and the case rested primarily on the disclosure of young children, often after extensive questioning by parents and therapists (Bybee & Mowbray,

1993; Schrieber, 2000). Furthermore, evidence has begun to accumulate questioning the reliability of children's testimony and the level of suggestibility in the interview techniques that were used to facilitate disclosure of the abuse (Garven, Wood, & Malpass, 2000; Schrieber, 2000). However, for some of these cases there is stronger evidence suggesting the accuracy of the claims (LaFontaine, 1994), therefore we will report here what is known about those who have been alleged to, or convicted of, perpetrating group sexual offenses against children.

Allegations of day care sexual abuse present unique challenges to clinicians, including the young age of the victims, multiple victims, multiple perpetrators, and in some cases accounts of ritualistic activities (Kelley, Brant, & Waterman, 1993). Perhaps the earliest large scale case involving child sexual abuse in a day care setting was the McMartin preschool case in Manhattan Beach California in 1984. This case involved allegations of serious sexual abuse by hundreds of preschool children (Bybee & Mowbray, 1993). This case began when a parent alleged that her 2 year old son had been sexually abused by a member of staff at the McMartin preschool. This was followed by a number of other children being interviewed by professionals using techniques that would now be considered inappropriate and likely to yield false reports (Ceci & Bruck, 1995). Over time those interviews resulted in over 300 charges of sexual abuse, much of it ritualistic in nature, that were said to occur in tunnels under the preschool perpetrated by a male staff member, his mother, and five other women who worked at the preschool (Wyatt, 2002). Although this proved to be the longest and most expensive case in U.S. history, these allegations resulted in no convictions (De Young, 1997). Finkelhor and colleagues (1988) conducted a national study of day care abuse cases ( $n=267$ ) that were



deemed to have been substantiated by at least one agency. They found that 17% of cases involved multiple perpetrators. It should be noted though that a number of cases which were included amongst these “substantiated cases” are controversial (e.g., the McMartin Preschool case) and did not lead to any convictions (De Young, 1997).

Day care child sexual abuse received a great deal of media attention in the 1980s to mid-90s (Kelley et al., 1993). Given the breadth of circumstances in which children are sexually abused and in which other types of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses occur, it is reasonable that such may occur in daycare settings. In spite of this, the evidence for the existence of such abuse and information about those who perpetrate it is not strong enough to draw firm conclusions. Newer evidence examining this phenomenon is lacking.

#### 2.2.4. Residential Care

The media provides accounts for a number of cases involving multiple perpetrators committing sexual abuse in residential care homes for children (e.g., Haute de la Garenne home in Jersey, UK). However, the information available about such abuse perpetrated by a group of individuals is limited. The Castle Hill School (a residential school for behaviorally disturbed boys) is one example of a documented case which initially involved a single perpetrator who managed to recruit more perpetrators until a unique setting was created in which “virtually the whole organization became an instrument for the victimization of children” (LaFontaine, 1993, p.227).

Some characteristics have been identified as being associated with abusers in residential homes for children, such as their charisma (Brannan, Jones, & Murch, 1993) and characteristics of the organization (e.g., “macho” care culture, poor training,

recruitment, and management structures; Berridge & Brodie, 1996). Factors identified as being related to sexual abuse in children's homes are inadequate preparation of staff, training and supervision of workers, boy's sexualized behavior responded to differently than girls, and limited use of child protection services to investigate and manage sexual abuse (Farmer & Pollock, 1998; Utting, 1991; Warner, 1992).

Green (2001) reported that some abusers in children's homes commit their offenses and avoid detection for quite extensive periods of time. In terms of the behavior of the abusers towards other staff members, strategies to ensure silence included achieving positions of power in the institution, derision of those who do not conform to the abusive regime, mental manipulation, trying to destroy positive relationships between non-abusive staff and children, bullying and diminishing power of non-abusive staff with the children, and abusive sexual and misogynistic remarks towards staff (Green, 2001). Tactics used to ensure the child's compliance and silence included intimidation to weaken the children's resistance, grooming to build trust and offer privileges, targeting of already victimized or vulnerable children, and use of drugs and alcohol to weaken resistance (Green, 2001). In the Castle Hill report, analyses demonstrated the influence of charismatic authority along with structural and individual power in facilitating the abuse (Brannan et al., 1993). As with the previous sub-categories of multiple perpetrator sexual offending against children, research in this domain is limited.

### 3. Multifactorial Theory of Multiple Perpetrator Sexual Offending

Theoretical frameworks allow professionals to understand the nature of a problem and this implicitly suggests the course of action that should be taken to eliminate it (Loseke, Gelles & Cavanagh, 2005). For a phenomenon as complex and varied as multiple

perpetrator sexual offending, a number of factors are likely to play a contributory role, although some elements (e.g., sexual deviance, unique situational context) will play a much more contributory role in some types of offenses than others.

The literature explaining the link between theoretical factors and multiple perpetrator sex offending is limited in many cases. Therefore, this review draws on available literature deemed relevant to provide explanations for this group behavior. The White and Kowalski (1998) proximal confluence model examines the interactive convergence of individual, sociocultural, and situational variables and does not specify any factors as more important than any others for predicting specific types of aggression, nor does it specify how the factors might interact. The goal of the model is to integrate a variety of relevant factors. This model is used as a framework to guide this review because it provides a comprehensive framework for explaining the sub-categories of multiple perpetrator sex offending and allows for the integration of a number of pertinent theories.

### 3.1. Individual

A number of individual characteristics will inevitably play a role in whether someone engages in sexual violence. Irrespective of any other factors, it is the responsibility of the individual to decide whether they will engage in the multiple perpetrator sexual offense. In spite of cultures and situational contexts that are highly conducive to sexual violence against women, there are some individuals who refrain from such violence in spite of tremendous pressure and danger in some cases (Henry, et al., 2004; Price, 2001). Several factors that are likely to play a role in increasing the chances of taking part in such activities are discussed below.

### 3.1.1. Deviant Sexual Interests

Deviant sexual interest is likely to play a strong role in the initiation of some multiple perpetrator sexual offenses. Although a number of etiological models exist to explain sexual offending (e.g., Marshall and Barbaree's (1990) Integrated Theory), these will not be covered here; for a comprehensive examination of theories of sexual offending see Ward, Polaschek, and Beech (2006). Deviant sexual interest (e.g., pedophilia) is the strongest predictor of sexual offenses in general in meta-analyses of dynamic predictors of sexual recidivism (Hanson & Bussière, 1998; Hanson & Morton-Bourgon, 2005). Others have found sexual deviance to be a predictor of violent (including sexual) recidivism as well (e.g., Quinsey, Rice, & Harris, 1995). Therefore it is likely this is an important driving force in at least some multiple perpetrator sexual offenses.

In particular, it is likely that deviant sexual interest drives the multiple perpetrator offenses against children. It is not expected that anyone other than those with an existing interest in children would seek out pedophile support organizations or child sex rings. Similarly, those with sexual interest in children may seek out employment in daycares or residential schools that would allow them access to children. It is proposed that for at least some people in the group, contact is established with peers who share similar sexual interests before group processes (e.g., social corroboration) take effect.

### 3.1.2. Cognition

It is expected that distorted attitudes (e.g., child abuse supportive beliefs) likely play an important role in many types of multiple perpetrator sexual offenses. It is proposed that individuals use cognitive restructuring to avoid the negative feelings associated with inappropriate behavior (Bandura, 1977). These cognitive distortions take the form of

beliefs, self-statements, or assumptions that are used to deny, justify, minimize, or rationalize behavior. Neutralization is a similar sociological concept describing the process used to disavow deviant behavior and present oneself as normal, attempting to dispute a deviant identity and normalize law-breaking behavior (De Young, 1988). Neutralizations are conceptualized as stigma-reducing strategies to lessen the expected legal and public reaction to the behavior. These often contain similar content to cognitive distortions. Distorted sexual thoughts or attitudes are widely thought to influence sexual offending (Abel et al., 1989; De Young 1988; Hanson & Harris, 2000; Hayoshino, Wurtele, & Klebe, 1995; Murphy, 1990; Stermac & Segal, 1989; Thornton, 2002). However, Gannon and Polaschek (2006) assert that more work needs to be done to increase our understanding of the role of cognitive distortions and provide support for theories explaining them.

Implicit theories are clusters of beliefs that are unified under an underlying schema (Gannon & Polaschek, 2006; Ward & Keenan, 1999). These implicit theories guide how one interprets their social world and are thought to develop during childhood to help people make sense of unusual occurrences in their lives, such as abuse (Ward & Keenan, 1999). For those with child victims the implicit theories that have been identified are “children as sexual beings” (i.e., children are inherently sexual and enjoy and seek out sex), “nature of harm” (i.e., only extreme violence results in harm and sex with children is not harmful and is not likely to cause any lasting damage), “dangerous world” (i.e., *all* individuals, including children are hostile and rejecting and must be dominated or all adults are hostile and rejecting but children are safe and accepting), “uncontrollability” (i.e., sexual urges are perceived as out of an individual’s control or other outside factors,

such as stress or alcohol are responsible), “entitlement” (i.e., some individuals are inherently superior and entitled to behave however they like) (Ward & Keenan, 1999). Similarly, in those with adult victims, the “dangerous world”, and “uncontrollability” implicit theories have been identified in addition to the “women are dangerous” (i.e., hostile attitudes towards women) and “women as sexual objects” implicit theories (Beech, Ward, & Fisher, 2006; Polaschek & Gannon, 2004).

Holding such implicit theories could explain how some individuals could commit a sexual offense, including sexual offenses in groups. Whilst these cognitions have been identified as pertinent to offenders committing individual sex offenses, research has not investigated the relationship with multiple perpetrator sex offenses. It is possible that individuals who hold these cognitions seek each other, or that such cognitions held by one or more individuals in a group, could influence others in that group, if relevant group processes such as deindividuation are at work.

### 3.2. Sociocultural

The influence of culture, social, and community factors are widely perceived as playing a role in sexual and nonsexual behavior (Henry et al., 2004), although the extent of this will be different for different individuals. This can include sexual inequalities, and gender roles, as well as cultural norms, values, and beliefs about women, sex, and violence (White & Kowalski, 1998). All of these factors could influence the behavior of individuals in a group, including their sexual behavior.

#### 3.2.1. Rape Culture and Rape Myths

Sanday (2007) describes rape cultures as those that lack the social constraints that discourage sexual aggression or contain social arrangements that encourage sexual

aggression. It has been suggested that American society is a “rape culture” in which the occurrence of sexual violence is supported by characteristics of the culture (Brownmiller, 1975). For instance, it is argued that fraternities create a sociocultural context in which the use of coercion in interactions with women is normative and that the mechanisms to keep this behavior in check are minimal or absent (Martin & Hummer, 1989). Morris (1996) also noted evidence of rape myths in small military units. Furthermore, some women who are “sexed in” to gangs are viewed as promiscuous and deserving of the treatment (Miller, 1998).

Rape myths are “attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women” (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994, p.134). In particular they serve to justify the cultural practice of sexual victimization of women (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Burt (1980) identified a cluster of attitudinal variables that were strong predictors of rape myth acceptance, such as gender role stereotyping, adversarial sexual attitudes, and acceptance of interpersonal violence. It is suggested that endorsing rape myths allows women to believe they have control over being victims of sexual assault if they behave in the “right” or “good” manner (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1995) and allow men to distance themselves from the “bad” men who commit sexual offenses (Franiuk, Seefeldt, & Vandello, 2008).

Individuals may come into a group setting or situation with these beliefs common to a rape culture already entrenched. Alternatively, individuals may come into the setting and adopt the beliefs of that rape culture if group processes are at work. Either way, a sociocultural context is created in which the individuals of the group normalize rape

myths, increasing the likelihood that multiple perpetrator sex offenses will be accepted and carried out by the group.

### 3.2.2. Hypermasculinity and Male Dominance

Feminist theory asserts that males and females are conditioned differently as a result of rigid gender roles, which influence one's expectations for sexual behavior (Henry et al., 2004). Masculinity is conceptualized as dominant, virile, and powerful, and femininity as passive and submissive therefore the expectation is that the male will be the sexual seducer and the female will be seduced (Levine & Koenig, 1939). As a corollary of patriarchal society, hypermasculinity arises which is perceived as an underlying cause of sexual aggression (Malamuth, Sockloskie, Koss, & Tanaka, 1991), 1991). Then, sex role patterns such as hypersexuality, aggressive masculinity, and coercive sexuality as normal, and ideology of male dominance are disseminated by the media, culture, society, and community (Henry et al, 2004; Russell & Finkelhor, 1984).

An ideology of male dominance is one aspect of a society that influences rape, according to Marshall and Barbaree (1990)'s integrated theory of sexual offending. Abel, Blanchard and Becker (1978) found that hyperidentification with a masculine role was common amongst rapists. Furthermore, sexually aggressive males are more likely to belong to a "male subculture" which emphasized masculine pursuits (Kanin, 1967) and to have a double standard with respect to perceived appropriate male and female behavior (Kanin, 1969). Studies by Hunter et al. (2000) and Bourgois (1996) highlight the patriarchal attitudes and hostility that male offenders participating in multiple perpetrator rape hold toward their female victims. Indeed, hostility to women has proved an important factor in explaining rape in general (White & Koss, 1993). For example,



Bourgois states how an interviewee legitimized his sexual violence with claims that he was teaching the females a lesson. This is in keeping with feminist theoretical accounts of male violence toward women which view violence toward women as a common event caused by societal rules which support male dominance and female subordination. Yllö (2005) reflects this in her assertion that:

violence grows out of inequality within marriage (and other intimate relations that are modelled on marriage) and reinforces male dominance and female subordination within the home and outside it. In other words violence against women...is a part of male control...It is not gender neutral any more than the economic division of labor or the institution of marriage is gender neutral (p22).

Goldstein (2001) suggests that men are encouraged to be soldiers based on ideas about manhood, therefore soldiers represent domination of the enemy in a gendered way (i.e., sexual violence against enemy women). He also argues that it is through loyalty to small units that enables them to cope with the conditions of battle and that bonding with the unit (in a gendered form) is therefore essential. Fraternities are also vitally concerned with masculinity (Martin & Hummer, 1989).

Sociocultural settings that promote or perpetuate hypermasculinity and male dominance create a sense of unity amongst individuals who hold such attitudes. For instance, the all male environment in gangs, fraternities and in many cases, war may emphasize the norms of masculinity which value male qualities and devalue females and female qualities (Boeringer, et al., 1991). Thus in the presence of such factors, a situation exists whereby sexualized violence towards women is accepted by the group.

### 3.3. Situational

A variety of situational factors are likely to play a role in increasing sexual violence committed in groups. Even if one's childhood circumstances should in theory build a resistance to being corrupted by sociocultural factors, strong situational factors may overpower these inhibitory controls, allowing the release of sexual aggression (Marshall & Barbaree, 1990; Zimardo, 2007).

### 3.3.1. Male Bonding

Male bonding is considered to be a force, link, or affectionate tie that serves the purpose of unifying men (Curry, 1991). It is suggested that male bonds are less characterized by intimacy and disclosure than bonding amongst females, but rather are derived from doing things together (Sherrod, 1987). Some activities through which men bond, involve negativity towards females (Curry, 1991). For instance in fraternities, members bond through sexist joking (Lyman, 1987) and a homosocial environment which makes it conducive to sexual aggression against women (Sanday, 2007). It has been argued that sexual activity provides a basis for competition and status within male peer groups, generates group solidarity, and facilitates male bonding (Brownmiller, 1975). The institutional bonding of men (e.g., in the military) is often accomplished through the exclusion of women and an ideological emphasis on men's superiority to women (Flood, 2008). It is also possible that the values, expectations, and sexual behavior of an individual's friends will influence their own sexual behavior (Brownmiller, 1975). Indeed men in fraternities were found to associate with a greater number of peers who engaged in or approved of sexually coercive behavior (Boeringer, et al., 1991). Rape is not uncommon in battle as an act of violence, to assert masculinity, and when it is committed as a group, as a means of male bonding (Brownmiller, 1975).

From several studies, (e.g., Hunter et al., 2000; Kjellgren et al., 2006) it can be surmised that some peer interactions are supportive of sexual assault (e.g., gang subculture and fraternities). Group behavior can promote male dominance and bonding, which is achieved via participating in the group rape and humiliation of the victim and/or by watching the assault (Holstrom & Burgess, 1980; Ullman, 1999).

In line with this interpretation of data, Bourgois (1996) provides an account of qualitative interviews with second and third generation Puerto Rican immigrants who resided in a crack house in El Barrio, New York. Accounts are provided from one male who had previously participated in multiple perpetrator rapes as an adolescent, but had ceased participation in such acts during adulthood. The offender describes how at first he could not participate in rapes due to an inability to get sexually aroused and how he felt humiliated and left out when he was goaded and sent home due to his inability to join in the offence. The interviewee goes on to detail how he later gained acceptance and admiration from the older boys for participating in the gang rapes, which were normalized by having peers with attitudes supportive of rape and violence to women. Indeed, Bourgois notes how:

...this violent act serves to bond the boys homoerotically and misogynistically...Participating in group rape is one of the ways youths achieve their manhood (p422).

Therefore it can be seen how group unity can be achieved via male bonding through the group sexual abuse of women.

### 3.3.2. Theories of Group Behavior

Multiple perpetrator sex offending by definition, involves more than one person therefore it must be considered a social process. Many of the factors discussed previously could explain why someone might commit a sexual offense either alone or with others. However, a number of theories of group behavior (i.e., social comparison theory, social dominance theory, deindividuation, conformity, and groupthink) are useful in understanding the phenomenon of multiple perpetrator sex offending. Descriptions of these theories are included under the heading of situational factors of the framework because they help explain why people in groups behave in certain ways in group situations. Although there are many theories explaining group behavior, only those deemed most pertinent in explaining multiple perpetrator sexual offending will be elaborated upon here.

Schultz (1967) suggests that groups are formed to meet interpersonal needs in that group formation and processes are seen as the result of member's need for inclusion (e.g., to belong), control (e.g., dominate), and affection (e.g., friendship). In meeting the need for inclusion and affection, social comparison theory posits that we look to others for support of our beliefs. When we find this support, the beliefs acquire a "social reality" that contributes to high levels of confidence which can in turn lead to extreme behaviors (Baron & Kerr, 2003). When disagreement occurs, first the group will try to persuade the other to their way of thinking, but in the event this does not work, rejection of the dissenting group member will result (Festinger, 1954) unless they conform. A clear example of this is provided in the quote by Bourgois (1996) which describes an individual partaking in a street gang multiple perpetrator rape to gain acceptance from the group. Such is also the case with individuals who recount they did not want to take part

in rapes in war but feared for their own safety if they did not (Price, 2001). Others have reported that they felt pressured to engage in the multiple perpetrator rapes as members of fraternities (Sanday, 2007). Similarly, in pedophile organizations members seek out these organizations to support their beliefs. This theory accounts for how the group members come to take part in the sexual offense and how the sexual behavior by the group is maintained. This could be used to explain any of the seven sub-categories outlined in this review.

In terms of groups meeting the need for control (Schultz, 1967), social dominance theory specifies that intergroup relations are derived largely from perceived social hierarchies referred to as “stratification systems” (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). A number of these stratification systems are based on age, gender, and socially-constructed hierarchies such as ethnicity, social class, religion, and nation (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). This has relevance in multiple perpetrator offenses against children which are based on an age hierarchy related to disproportionate power over younger people (e.g., abuse in day care and residential care settings), and against women by men (e.g., in street gangs and fraternities) based on their disproportionate lack of social and political power. The socially constructed hierarchies such as those based on ethnicity or religion are directly relevant to group sexual aggression in war.

Once groups are formed, group norms are established (Goldstein, 2002). Group norms are the behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of what is approved and expected of group members (Baron & Kerr, 2003). They have powerful effects on the thoughts and actions of group members (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Settings in which multiple perpetrator sexual occurs, such as fraternities and war have established group norms that allow

multiple perpetrator sexual offenses to occur. These can be generated through a number of the other factors discussed above (e.g., rape myths and male bonding).

Conformity refers to cases in which a person changes their attitudes, statements, or behavior to adhere to a group norm (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Normative social influences affecting conformity are based on rewards and punishments which are controlled by the group (Baron & Kerr, 2003). In one type of normative social influence referred to as compliance, an individual might change the behavior and verbal expressions, even if their actual attitudes have not changed (Baron & Kerr, 2003). It is plausible that this type of conformity is seen in street gangs, fraternity members, and in day care abuse. Conformity is more likely to occur when individuals face a unanimous consensus and those who deviate are likely to be punished (e.g., in war, residential care) or rejected (e.g., fraternities), or if the group is made up of friends that the individual admires or does not want to disrespect (e.g., gangs; Baron & Kerr, 2003). This is in contrast to obedience to authority which describes the actions of individuals when complying with the orders of perceived superiors (Milgram, 2005). Obedience to authority is clearly directly relevant to multiple perpetrator rape in war in cases in which rape is used as a military policy (Buss, 1998). Milgram notes “behavior that is unthinkable in an individual who is acting on his own may be executed without hesitation when carried out under orders” (p. xvii).

Within groups, social corroboration can be created when others agree with our attitudes or choices which can be a source of heightened confidence (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Those who hold extreme views are often more confident in those views, perhaps because one must be confident in the face of beliefs that may entail potential ridicule (Baron et al., 1996) or even scorn in the case of pedophilic sexual interest. Evidence also

supports the idea that having one's opinion corroborated is a powerful way of increasing confidence in the validity of a position (Baron et al., 1996). This is relevant to those who offend in pedophile organizations, child sex rings, and day care centers.

Deindividuation is a group process which occurs when someone loses their sense of individuality and becomes submerged in a group (Goldstein, 2002). Zimbardo (2007) states that:

Deindividuation creates a unique psychological state in which behavior comes under the control of immediate situational demands and biological, hormonal urges. Action replaces thought, seeking immediate pleasure dominates delaying gratification and mindfully restrained decisions give way to mindless emotional responses. A state of arousal is often a precursor to and consequence of deindividuation (Zimbardo, 2007, p.305).

The notion of deindividuation describes individuals in crowds as less-self-conscious and therefore more impulsive and willing to engage in anti-social behavior (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Indeed, according to Zajonc (1965) when people are around others, they are more physically excited and motivated.

Deindividuation also makes perpetrators anonymous, allowing them to act without accountability, responsibility, and self-monitoring (Zimbardo, 2007).

Furthermore, when a number of individuals engage in a deviant act, diffusion of responsibility occurs in that any one individual feels less responsible for their actions (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Therefore when aggression occurs in groups, individuals absolve themselves of guilt by attributing primary responsibility to others (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Aggressive behaviors have been found to escalate in groups in comparison to individual

task performance, which has been linked to the process of deindividuation (Goldstein, 2002). For example, group-administered aggression (in the form of shocks) has been shown to exceed individual-administered aggression in terms of pace and intensity of shocks (Jaffe & Yinon, 1979; Jaffe, Shaprio, & Yinon, 1981). Although the application of this process has been tested in relation to non-sexual aggression, its relevance to multiple perpetrator sex offending is apparent. Deindividuation would be relevant in all the group offending contexts discussed here.

Groupthink is the view that groups promote self-censorship, stifle dissent, and lead to exaggerated feelings of moral correctness and superiority (Baron & Kerr, 2003). This can be triggered by antecedent conditions such as directive leadership style, intense group cohesion, similarity of ideology, pressure for unanimity, insecure member self-esteem and group insulation from critics (Janis, 1982). These forms then combine to suppress dissent to the point that members may support policies or norms that are not well-considered, resulting in poor decision making (Janis, 1982). Considering these points, groupthink may be most relevant to multiple perpetrator sex offending in street gangs, fraternities, war, and explain why employees in residential homes may partake in or turn a blind eye to, the abuse of children.

### 3.3.3. Unique Settings

A number of specific settings are more conducive to multiple perpetrator sexual offending. Green (2001) highlights the need to analyze and contextualize the setting itself. The situational context refers to the specific external stimuli that influence the likelihood of an individual behaving in a sexually aggressive manner, either with or without underlying vulnerabilities (Henry et al., 2004). Zimbardo (2007) claims that



Good people can be induced, seduced, and initiated into behaving in evil ways. They can also act in irrational, stupid, self-destructive, antisocial, and mindless ways when immersed in “total situations” that impact human nature in ways that challenge our sense of the stability and consistency of individual personality, of character, and of morality (p. 211).

For instance, the situational aspects of war are much different from non-war situations (Zimbardo, 2007). Wartime is an environment defined by aggression and violence that could potentially disinhibit one’s self-regulatory mechanisms against sexual violence (Henry et al., 2004). Evidence suggests that rape is common during war by a high proportion of men when there are few appropriate sexual outlets, high social support for rape, antagonistic attitudes towards the victim’s group, and the perceived likelihood of punishment is low (Smuts, 1996).

Green (2001) suggests that problems with abuse in residential schools are embedded in issues of power and powerlessness, how children are perceived, sexuality and abuse, and social structures influence morality and ideas about what is normal. Goffman (1961) characterizes “total institutions” as emphasizing uniformity, control, surveillance over care, development and individuality, and the emergence of separate and divisive staff and resident cultures. These characteristics were found in a majority of residential homes (Green & Parkin, 1999). Many of these homes were socially isolated from wider organizations and their communities (Green, 2001). Staff tended to focus more on the control and surveillance issues and less on the needs of the children. Children therefore were less likely to trust staff with sensitive information because of the perceived divide between staff and the children who resided there.

In relation to pedophile organizations, the anonymity of computer –mediated communication can heighten the expression of unpopular or extreme ideas (e.g., pedophilia) (Baron & Kerr, 2003). It is also noted that computer-mediated communication results in group members feeling more social cohesion and more awareness of their common group-based characteristics because of the lack of the personalizing cues that are provided in face-to-face communication (Baron & Kerr, 2003). Individuals with stigmatized attitudes can find corroboration for their ideas through the anonymity the internet affords (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Those who participated in newsgroups with others who held similar “marginal” beliefs to their own, were also more likely to feel greater social identification with that group resulting in improved self-acceptance, and less perceived estrangement from others (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). Baron and colleagues (1996) found that social corroboration from others, who agree with one’s extreme opinions, intensifies one’s confidence and belief extremity about that issue.

Ward and Hudson (2000) have suggested that pedophilic offenders gravitate toward environments (e.g., other individuals with similar attitudes and beliefs) that support their own lifestyles and belief systems. It is reasonable then that those with a sexual interest in children may attempt to seek validation for their deviant interest from others who share their beliefs in online communities. These communities allow individuals with these deviant interests to contact others who share their deviant ideology, thus reinforcing their beliefs (Durkin & Bryant, 1999; Malesky & Ennis, 2004). The members of these groups often describe themselves as “boy-lovers” seemingly in an effort to promote more of a positive self-concept than that implied by the term

“pedophile” (Durkin, 1997). It is also noted that the group identity is likely solidified by the shared sense of danger and paranoia that surrounds such groups (Jenkins, 1991). The fact that the user is in contact with individuals who not only share their pedophilic interests, but also share other socially acceptable interests may have a normalizing effect on one's perception of their deviant interests (Malesky & Ennis, 2004).

Therefore, considering the aforementioned literature, it is important to consider the role that situation alone can exert on group sexual behavior. As Zimbardo (2007) states “a large body of evidence in social psychology supports the concept that situational power triumphs over individual power in given contexts” (p.x).

#### 4. Conclusions

Together, the sources of information reviewed highlight that multiple perpetrator sexual offending is complex with some areas better understood (e.g., war, fraternities) and researched than others (e.g., sex rings and daycares). However, it is clear that this is a heterogeneous phenomenon, requiring consideration of many offense types and motivating factors. This review is the first to consider several (seven) subcategories under the umbrella term of multiple perpetrator sex offenses. It also puts forward some provisional ideas to stimulate thought and further research in this area.

It is evident that theories of group behavior are relevant in all of the seven subcategories of multiple perpetrator sex offenses. In terms of multiple perpetrator offenses against adults, a number of additional factors are important. Specifically, cognitions, rape myths, hypermasculinity and male dominance, as well as male bonding all play an important role. Wartime rape is unique in that it is very strongly influenced by situational factors in addition to the aforementioned factors.

For those multiple perpetrator offenses against children, a different set of primary factors appear most relevant. In particular, all of these contexts are likely driven by sexual deviance and distorted cognitions. In addition to sexual deviance and cognitions, multiple perpetrator abuse in residential care and pedophile organizations appear to be driven by unique situational factors.

One important aspect discussed is the apparent differences in the primary factors associated with perpetrators who offend against children in comparison to peers/adults. From this review it could be speculated that the motivation for many sexual offenses against children seems to stem initially from sexual deviance and distorted cognitions which then drive an offender's desire to seek out a group of like minded perpetrators who can corroborate their deviant sexual interests. In contrast, for those offences committed against adult victims it appears that a number of other factors seem to motivate the individual to become initially involved in the group and that sex offending occurs as a corollary of the group membership (i.e., male bonding; rape myths) rather than being driven by deviant sexual interest per se. This may have important implications for intervention and preventative work. However, it is important to note that the theory and research discussing features of multiple perpetrator sex offenders, or research specifically looking at group processes as applied sex offending is limited.

As highlighted, many problems with definitional issues currently exist hampering further research and understanding in this area. Clarification and consistency in the use of terminology amongst practitioners and researchers will aid clarity in this area and allow robust research to be carried out. For example, additional research is needed to examine

the potential differences between perpetrators who offend in groups of two in comparison to larger groups.

In conclusion, this review demonstrates the need to conduct more work in this area. Specifically, research that examines the contribution of psychological theory to our understanding of this phenomenon is needed. Viewing multiple perpetrator sex offences through the group aggression literature will increase our understanding of the nature, purpose and maintenance of such sexually aggressive groups, which will aid the success of much needed prevention and intervention efforts.

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